

# Forum

VOLUME TWO, NUMBER TWO

OCTOBER 1958

FROM THE LABOUR STANDARD

We are reproducing here some of Engels's articles in the "Labour Standard" of 1881. This paper was founded by the London Trades Council under the editorship of George Shipton, the secretary of that body, on which served a number of militant trade unionists associated with the First International.

Engels wrote ten articles for the journal, but their tenor proved too "revolutionary" for the liberal-minded and predominantly reformist Trades Council, and Engels ceased to write for it. In Engels' words - "The newspaper has remained the gathering place of all possible and impossible muddleheads and in its concrete policy..... inclines toward Gladstone."

We are reproducing some of the articles in these pages as they may be unfamiliar to many party members and give an admirably lucid statement on some of the basic tenets of Marxism.

Editorial Committee.

## A FAIR DAY'S WAGE FOR A FAIR DAY'S WORK

This has now been the motto of the English working-class movement for the last fifty years. It did good service in the time of the rising Trades Unions after the repeal of the infamous Combination Laws in 1824; it did still better service in the time of the glorious Chartist movement, when the English workmen marched at the head of the European working class. But times are moving on, and a good many things which were desirable and necessary fifty, and even thirty years ago, are now antiquated and would be completely out of place. Does the old, time-honoured watchword too belong to them?

A fair day's wage for a fair day's work? But what is a fair day's wage, and what is a fair day's work? How are they determined by the laws under which modern society exists and develops itself? For an answer to this we must not apply to the science of morals or of law and equity, nor to any sentimental feeling of humanity, justice, or even charity. What is morally fair, what is even fair in law, may be far from being socially fair. Social fairness or unfairness is decided by one science alone - the science which deals with the material facts of production and exchange, the science of political economy.

Now what does political economy call a fair day's wages

and a fair day's work? Simply the rate of wages and the length and intensity of a day's work which are determined by competition of employer and employed in the open market. And what are they, when thus determined?

A fair day's wage, under normal conditions, is the sum required to procure to the labourer the means of existence necessary, according to the standard of life of his station and country, to keep himself in working order and to propagate his race. The actual rate of wages, with the fluctuations of trade, may be sometimes above, sometimes below this rate; but, under fair conditions, that rate ought to be the average of all oscillations.

A fair day's work is that length of working day and that intensity of actual work which expends one day's full working power of the workman without encroaching upon his capacity for the same amount of work for the next and following days.

The transaction, then, may be thus described - the workman gives to the Capitalist his full day's working power; that is, so much of it as he can give without rendering impossible the continuous repetition of the transaction. In exchange he receives just as much, and no more, of the necessaries of life as is required to keep up the repetition of the same bargain every day. The workmen gives as much, the Capitalist gives as little, as the nature of the bargain will admit. This is a very peculiar sort of fairness.

But let us look a little deeper into the matter. As, according to political economists, wages and working days are fixed by competition, fairness seems to require that both sides should have the same fair start on equal terms. But that is not the case. The Capitalist, if he cannot agree with the Labourer, can afford to wait, and live upon his capital. The workman cannot. He has but wages to live upon, and must therefore take work when, where, and at what terms he can get it. The workmen has no fair start. He is fearfully handicapped by hunger. Yet, according to the political economy of the Capitalist class, that is the very pink of fairness.

But this is a mere trifle. The application of mechanical power and machinery to new trades, and the extension and improvements of machinery in trades already subjected to it, keep turning out of work more and more "hands"; and they do so at a far quicker rate than that at which these superseded "hands" can be absorbed by, and find employment, in, the manufactures of the country. These superseded "hands" form a real industrial army, of reserve for the use of Capital. If trade is bad they may starve beg, steal, or go to the workhouse; if trade is good they are ready to hand to expend production; and until the very last man, woman, or child of this army of reserve shall have found work - which happens in times of frantic over-production alone - until then will its competition keep down wages, and by its existence alone strengthen the power of Capital in its struggle with Labour. In the race with Capital, Labour is not only handicapped, it has to drag a cannon-ball riveted to its foot. Yet this is fair according to Capitalist political economy.

But let us inquire out of what fund does Capital pay these

very fair wages? Out of capital, of course. But capital produces no value. Labour, is besides the earth, the only source of wealth; capital itself is nothing but the stored-up produce of labour. So that the wages of Labour are paid out of labour, and the working man is paid out of his own produce. According to what we may call common fairness, the wages of the labourer ought to consist in the produce of his labour. But that would not be fair according to political economy. On the contrary, the produce of the workman's labour goes to the Capitalist, and the workman gets out of it no more than the bare necessities of life. And thus the end of this uncommonly "fair" race of competition is that the produce of the labour of those who do work, gets unavoidably accumulated in the hands of those who do not work, and becomes in their hands the most powerful means to enslave the very men who produced it.

A fair day's wage for a fair day's work! A good deal might be said about the fair day's work too, the fairness of which is perfectly on a par with that of the wages. But that we must leave for another occasion. From what has been stated it is pretty clear that the old watchword has lived its day, and will hardly hold water nowadays. The fairness of political economy, such as it truly lays down the laws which rule actual society, that fairness is all on one side - on that of Capital. Let, then, the old motto be buried for ever and replaced by another:

POSSESSION OF THE MEANS OF WORK - RAW MATERIAL,  
FACTORIES, MACHINERY - BY THE WORKING PEOPLE THEMSELVES.

The Labour Standard, London,  
May 7th 1881.

---

#### FORUM NO. 2.

---

We hope that, with this issue, members can make up their minds that this journal is a worthwhile proposition, and do their best to support it with subscriptions, articles, and letters.

The next issue will (so far as possible) include the following:-

Value, part II	By E. Wilmott.
Value and Exchange Value.	By J. D'Arcy.
Philosophy and Society, I.	By R. Coster.
Advertising.	By A. Ivimey.

If you wish to submit a contribution for the next issue, please try to submit it at soon as possible. All subscriptions and contributions should be sent to I.P.J. Committee at Head Office. The subscription rates are 4/- for six issues, and 7/6 for twelve issues.(both post free)

Editorial Committee.

Further to "Llaregub"

Dear Comrades,

Comrade Jarvis is to be complimented on his courage in trying to assess the qualities of the late Dylan Thomas. I use the word "courage" quite deliberately as anyone who makes such an attempt is worthy of the term.

Of course, Jarvis as a socialist writer is well able to analyse scientifically and objectively a piece of writing which seeks to explain human society, its problems and suggested amelioration. Unfortunately, Dylan Thomas is a bad choice, for two reasons. First, to my mind, Dylan had no message to give society; secondly his writing is of a quality that defies scientific analysis inasmuch as it is the tumbling torrent that comes from the springs of sentiment, a wave of passionate verbiage and musical alliteration. Words in profusion, wandering around and away from the point. In short - glorious abandonment - with not too much attention to the story. How to make a case for this is indeed a task.

What then can be said for Dylan? It is very doubtful whether he believed in anything with any sincerity. He delighted in poking his snub nose into situations in order to catch people with their trousers down (or their skirts up) and to raise a bood belly-laugh at their expense. It is only fair to say that he often included himself in the rollicking game.

Yet, despite the lack of social content, "message", etc., in his work, it will live. Everybody loves the humourist, the clown, and (let it be said) the good natured fool, especially if he happens to be talented. Those among us who were fortunate enough to listen to his ramblings bubbling out of those pouty lips, in between swigs of his beer pot, will know what I mean.

To place him in the category of Tressell - a man with a far less reservoir of word pictures, though with a heart that beat strongly for the working class, is quite wrong. Not that Thomas was without depth of feeling, he had plenty of it - at times when not quite sober.

He certainly took Wales by the scruff of the neck and delivered hefty kicks at her communal backside. It is true that he exposed, in a poetic manner, the shortcomings of a little community (probable Laughne) with the usual poetic exaggeration. He was, despite the tempestuous manner of his outpourings, his indulgence in adjectival embellishments, a craftsman in the use of words. To him the words themselves were what mattered. He was a weaver of word patterns in the abstract; one might say word magic. Magic is of course meaningless, but can be quite impressive, not to say exciting.

He was a somewhat bewildered young man, bewildered with beer, women and Celtic mysticism. Comrade Jarvis or anyone else is welcome to try and make some kind of a scientific socialistic explanation from such ingredients. Most of all he was - just Dylan - the word spinner. He started by cutting his initials on school desks at the Swansea Grammar school and ended by cutting up a fuss and flutter in the critics' world. Like Oscar Wilde and Caradoc Evans, he was indeed a character who perhaps defies any rational explanation. Perhaps one might add "Who wants to be rational all the time?"

W. BRAIN.

WEALTH AND COMMODITIES

1. Always bear in mind that Marxian economics are the only method that you can use to understand the fundamental nature of Capitalist Society. You cannot understand the exploiting mechanism, the creation of Surplus Value or Industrial Crises, without some knowledge of the Marxian Theoretical system.
2. Marx's system can, broadly speaking, be divided into two parts - (1) the theories of the causes of the development of human societies, dealing largely with the historical pattern of the social forces of production and distribution and the material circumstances surrounding their use and the relations of men living in those societies. The conception of history, the M.C.H., an essential introduction to the second part of the system. (2) The examination of a particular form of human society - Capitalism.

It would be legitimately claimed that before Marx's time, the science of political economy was unknown. (the production of wealth by organised societies, and its distribution; (investigation along scientific lines)).

3. This was a mammoth task - the reason why Marx undertook this exhaustive work is worth mentioning briefly.

1842-43 - Editor of *Rheinische Zeitung* (German Radical Paper). Embarrassed when he had to take part in discussions as Editor on so called material interests. Rising Capitalism in Germany, like Capitalism elsewhere, was colliding with existing property groups, Feudal landlords, merchant Capitalists, Religious groups. Such questions as Forest Thefts, sub-division of Landed Property, Free Trade, etc. He had to express an opinion through editorials on these questions, with which he was largely unfamiliar.

Another complication was the ideas being expressed by the school of French Socialists. Marx had previously studied history, philosophy, and jurisprudence. He was not then an economist. The current economists, particularly the English classical school led by David Ricardo, had worked out parts of his economic theory before him, but the system as such, the combination of parts into a systematic structure and the theory of Surplus Value, are his own.

Marx had to construct an economic history of his own. The classical school accepted Capitalism as natural, independent of historical development in its origin, and final in its application. Their position could be compared to that of the social reformers to-day, who regard Capitalism as the best possible social system with eternal relations of private ownership in the means of production - and deal with the effects as if they were natural causes.

This offended Marx's better historical understanding,

and he began the dynamic examination as opposed to the static investigation by the classical economists. Marx maintained that the Capitalist organisation of society was neither an accident or God-visited, but was in fact the product of a whole series of historical social processes which have their basis in the way men over the ages had got their livelihood, their industrial relationship to the means of production and the development of their social relations, institutions and political forms, arising from those industrial relations which he termed the economic structure of society.

Capitalism had to be examined from a historical standpoint, therefore, a dynamic one and not a static one.

The extent of the investigation was:-

- (a) What are the sources of Society's wealth ?
- (b) How, and in what manner, is it produced ?
- (c) What factors, circumstances and conditions are necessary for its production, preservation and accumulation ?
- (d) How, and in what manner, and in accordance with what principles, is it divided amongst the different social groups ?
- (e) How does this division affect the relations of the Groups and the individuals participating in it ?
- (f) What are the resulting forms governing the direction of its general movement ?
- (g) What are the historical limits of this economic organisation ?

Marx had to find answers to those questions in 1845. It took a lifetime of study, but he found the answers. We have to answer the same questions. In fact, we are the only people who are interested in answering them, as the answers clearly point to a one-sided organised chaos which has to be removed quickly. The scientific validity for Socialism has been clearly established.

Socialists talk about the common ownership of the means of wealth production. What is Wealth ? (Always in the economic sense, not spiritual, abstract common usage. (concrete term)). Natural Wealth consists of all nature given raw materials, and wild animals, fish in the sea, fruit on trees, coal in the ground, and every other substance including Oil in the bowels of the desert or natural Gas., which men work on to produce the social means of sustenance.

Social labour is married to those raw materials, and as a result Use-Values are created (articles of utility and consumption), and several uses corresponding to the needs of the stage of development of a particular society. For example- the creation of Use-Values differs in Feudal society from Barbarism, as it will from Capitalism to Socialism. The use-Value of any particular product is a matter for history to decide.]

When we deal with Value and Exchange Value we will deal with this aspect.

Social or economic Wealth is the sum total of these Use Values. No form of Wealth comes into existence without the application of Human Labour, and human labour cannot produce Wealth without working on the materials provided by nature. Coal in the ground is useless unless it is mined. Fish in the sea might as well not exist unless they are caught and distributed. Mineral Deposits, Oil, Fruit on trees - all these are useless until they are fertilised by the labour of society. This brings them into existence, this realises their social usefulness.

Wealth, therefore, is the sum of Use-Values arising as a result of the application of Labour to nature given raw materials and this definition of Wealth can equally apply to Socialist society as well as to Capitalism.

Society itself is an organisation for production. What we are concerned with, along with Marx, is what happens to the products; what form do they take? It was fairly obvious that the Capitalist did more than merely permit the relatively simple process of the production of Use-Values.

Marx begins his famous work Capital with the following equally famous and devastating sentence. "The Wealth of those societies in which the Capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities, its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation therefore must begin with the examination of the analysis of the commodity."

If you compare this statement with the opening chapters of the English classical school we mentioned earlier, there is a wealth of difference.

Adam Smith "Wealth of Nations".

"The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes, and which consists always either in the immediate produce of that labour or in what is purchased with that produce from other Nations".

David Ricardo's book "Principles".

"The produce of the earth, all that is derived from its surface by the united application of labour, machinery and capital, is divided among 3 classes of the community, namely the proprietors of the land, the owner of the stock or capital necessary for its cultivation, and the labourers by whose industry it is cultivated. But in different stages of society the proportions of the whole produce of the earth which will be allotted to each of these classes under the names of rent, profit and wages, will be essentially different, depending mainly on the actual fertility of the soil,

on the accumulation of Capital, and population, and on the skill, ingenuity and instruments employed in agriculture".

All these great luminaries of the science of Political Economy are ready to lay down general laws governing human society without regard to time and place. They are oblivious to the fact that the laws of Capitalist society have no universal application, and are limited to a certain historical situation, and are far from being universal, eternal or anything else of that nature.

Marx's statement on the commodity, with one mighty stroke of the pen, placed Capitalism in perspective and in its proper historical setting. No soaring in the air, no generalisations that may fit everything in general and nothing in particular. We start to deal with the real condition, a real-life situation with definite burning problems.

## COMMODITIES

### 1. What is a commodity ?

First and foremost it is a product of human labour, under definite social conditions of production which can only apply to Capitalist society. It is an article produced for sale or exchange with a view to profit. It contains two diametrical opposites - Use-Value and Exchange-Value. A distinctive property of a commodity, that quality that makes any ordinary article of consumption whether it be shirts, coats, food or houses, an article of merchandise, is its Exchange Value. They can be bought and sold as well as worn, eaten or lived in.

Use-Value is the utility of an article and is something inherent in its nature in the very mode of its existence. It would exist in all societies irrespective of mode of production. A thing possesses Exchange-Value only to the person who has no use for it, and loses its Exchange Value when its Use-Value asserts itself.

Commodity production is peculiar to Capitalist society. When we talk about commodity production we mean a condition where the dominant means and almost entire means of social production are devoted to the production of articles for sale and exchange. Commodities have been produced in human societies before Capitalism but their production was confined to hand-craftsmen or incidental surpluses. Their production was never a mass social process as it is to-day. It is only in Capitalist society that commodity production becomes the prevailing mode of production. A peasant family may produce or spin flax in order that it may be woven into linen to be used by the family itself as an article of use, but this will not make the flax a commodity. If however the flax is spun in order to exchange for wheat, then that simple process of exchanging stamps the article as a commodity. This is naturally a simple or elementary form of exchange, but you can see the germ or the possibility of exchanging the flax for iron, milk wood, clothing or any other social product.

Consider the position of the patriarchal peasant family in history. It satisfied its own needs. This peasant family is a type of social organism based on the co-operation of various kinds of labour; ploughing and sowing are carried on, cattle are milked, wood is carved, wool is spun, woven and knitted. The various types of labour co-operate and dove-tail into each other. These products are not exchanged but are in fact divided among the family.

Let us assume that the means of production in this agricultural community are perfected to a point where less labour than formerly is devoted to agriculture, whereby a certain amount of labour power is set free which, provided all other things being equal, will be devoted to exploiting a deposit of flint in the communal territory, making flint tools and weapons. The productivity of labour is so great that far more tools and weapons are made than the community needs. A tribe of nomadic shepherds in the course of its wanderings comes into contact with this community. The same thing has happened in this community. The productivity of labour has also increased and they are actually producing more cattle than they need. It is obvious that this tribe will gladly exchange its superfluous cattle for the superfluous tools and weapons of the agricultural community. Through this active exchange the superfluous cattle and the superfluous tools become commodities.

The important point to notice here is that the existence of the exchanged commodities commences with the development of the productive forces beyond the limited needs of the primitive communities. This primitive Communism becomes a fetter on the progress of technical development when this development has reached a certain level. The mode of production demands the widening of the circle of social labour. However, as these separate tribal communities were independent and even hostile to each other, this widening is not possible through the extension of systematic communist labour, but only through the mutual exchange of the superfluous goods produced by the labour of the communities. Harking back to the M.C. of H., we see how necessary it was to show the pattern of social development and to make the claim made by Marx that no society goes out of existence until all the productive forces for which there are room are fully developed. Tribal Communism entered that category; so did Feudalism, and latterly, Capitalism, which cannot use the productive forces at its disposal.

A commodity is therefore a product of useful social labour which can be re-produced by society, and which is produced for the purposes of sale and exchange.

(to be continued)

---

The next article in this series will appear in the next issue and will deal with Value and Exchange Value.

The second article in Comrade Wilmott's series on Value has been held over until next month.

Sinclair Lewis, although undoubtably a significant American writer, was not the spokesman of his age in the way that Hemmingway or Fitzgerald were. In his comparatively early years, after the publication of Babbitt and Main Street, it was thought that here was the long-awaited social critic of Middle-Class America. Events however, have proved this assessment wrong.

It is true that Lewis in these two books, which are perhaps his most important works, turned the searchlight of satire upon the lives, ambitions and frustrations of the small-town American businessman of the 'twenties and 'thirties. The satire-fantasy of the excesses of these people is brilliant in places, as for instance, the description of the Zenith club in Babbitt:— "The entrance lobby was Gothic, the washroom Roman Imperial, the lounge Spanish Mission, and the reading-room in Chinese Chippendale, but the gem of the club was the dining room, the masterpiece of Ferdinand Reitman, Zenith's busiest architect. It was lofty and half timbered, with Tudor leaded casements, an oriel, a somewhat musicianless musicians-gallery, and tapestries believed to illustrate the granting of Magna Charta. The open beams had been hand-adzed at Jake Offutt's car-body works, the hinges were of hand-wrought iron, the wainscot studded with hand-made pegs, and at one end of the room was a heraldic and hooded stone fireplace, which the club's advertising pamphlet asserted to be not only larger than any of the fireplaces in European castles, but of a draught incomparably more scientific. It was also much cleaner, as no fire had ever been built in it." One might easily believe from the many passages of this kind that Lewis was a castigator of Middle-Class America.

However, on closer examination, it is found that this is not so. Lewis's subsequent works did not evidence much anger or criticism at the way America and American business was going. Lewis, in fact, liked his middle-class characters. He had a great affection for his Babbitts and Dodsworths and approved of them, and also implicitly approved of American big business and the monstrosities that it produced.

What is really behind this ambiguous attitude is Lewis's lack of understanding. While Lewis professed utopian socialist views, in fact he never understood the workings of capitalism, and like all utopians, was constantly seeking solutions in "men of good will", "honest businessmen", and the like.

Lewis's heroes, apparently, were the people with vision, the craftsmen, the scientists, the efficiency experts, the people who would see how to organise and run things, and eradicate the tire-

is a hotel-keeper, who works his way through all the stages of hotel work until he eventually achieves his life ambition - to run a perfect hotel where everyone is contented, the cooking peerless, and presumably the charges reasonable. Dodsworth, too, is this type of man, far more concerned with the technical problems of producing an excellent medium-priced car than with realising enormous profits. What happens to these heroes is really quite enlightening - they get pushed out by big business.

Perhaps the most damning criticism that can be levelled at Lewis is that the majority of his work dated very quickly. Readers of today, nourished on say, Tennessee Williams or William Faulkner, can only snigger at the naivities of Dodsworth (1929) for instance, which itself is one of Lewis's better works. Although there is much to admire and approve of in his novels, there is also much that is tiresome, and many of the characters appear as no more than improbable pasteboard figures, with very little relevance to reality. Here, Lewis makes an interesting comparison with Bernard Shaw, both of them using their characters to express a struggle between opposing ideas and ideals, and both of them completely unable to breath life into their characters.

Lewis, in his early novels, clearly showed his leaning towards Utopian Socialism, and in fact he joined Upton Sinclair's "Socialist" community at Helicon Hall in his early years. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the development of his ideas is to examine his novels in chronological order and look at the ideas that they express.

His first novel, or at least the first novel published under his name, Our Mr. Wrenn (1914), is a whimsical tale of a "little man" chained to his job and imprisoned by his notions of respectability, who receives an inheritance and is able to fulfill his dreams of travel. On his travels he is confronted with a world of Bohemianism and politics, and eventually turns into a complete and philosophical businessman. In a somewhat similar vein, The Innocents (1917) tells of the fantastic exploits of a pathetic lower middle-class couple who achieve "success" and their hearts desires. Here though, the whimsicality is carried so far as to make the novel almost completely absurd, and even Lewis subsequently agreed that it was "a flagrant excursion into sentimentality".

The Job (1917) carries Lewis's ideas a stage further, into the concept of "business craftsmanship", an idea that was to remain dear to him for the rest of his career. The heroine of the novel is a quasi-emancipated woman, Une Golden, who sets out from her small-town middle-class backyard to find life and adventure

finishes up as an efficient businesswoman running a chain of hotels, married to another "scientific businessman" and thus Job and Domesticity are happily combined.

Another early novel, The Trail of the Hawk deals with another section of American life that Lewis knew and loved - the prairie hamlets of the Mid-West with their tin shacks and saloons. The description of the Western countryside and the hero's early life is quite interesting, but when the novel moves again to the "scientific business" of aircraft and pilots, the story becomes bogged down and tiresome.

Main Street, (1920), which marked the beginning of Lewis's real career, is basically a domestic drama against the background of a small town in the American Middlewest. Carol Kennicott, brought on her marriage to the small town Gopher Prairie, is disgusted at the backwardness of the inhabitants, and they in turn, are derisive of her "culture". The subsidiary characters in the novel, whom one might term the small town intellectuals, are pathetic and rather absurd, but Lewis does in this work capture the then current changing spirit of American life, from provincial backwardness to industrial "hustle".

"Babbitt", which is in many ways Lewis's most rewarding work, tells of a perplexed small-town businessman who continually struggles to acquire more and more material possessions without in the least knowing why. In the process, he himself becomes moulded by these material possessions and the struggle to obtain them. Babbitt is the classic account of the American middle class empire. Its hero, George F. Babbitt, is a real estate dealer who lives in Floral Heights, a desirable suburb of Zenith - "The Zip City". His house has all the benefits of modern civilisation and is just like every other house in the district. The remarkable virtue of the novel is that although the characters are never completely credible and seldom come to life, the description of their lives and surroundings is completely convincing, and provides a remarkable commentary on American middle class existence.

Arrowsmith (1925), Lewis's third important work, combines a satire of the profitable exploitation of medicinal research with an account of a young man's progress from a village-doctor background to a cynical town medical man. Although the subject

remarkable contrast. The first is a romantic, trashy, pot-boiler, and is to present-day eyes, hopelessly dated. The other, however, is perhaps Lewis's most lasting work.

Elmer Gantry is a fascinating account of a grasping, unscrupulous "hot gospeller" who treads on the faces of the more timid souls on his way up the ladder of religious big business. The most absorbing part of the novel is the descriptions of the atmosphere at revival meetings, and of the struggles between the rival money-grubbing religious outfits.

As we know too well, this kind of picture is still valid, and the descriptions of the "Lively Sunday evenings"; "Committee on Public Morals"; and the "Salesmanship of Salvation", complete with celestial choirs and the rest, strike very near home.

The Man who Knew Coolidge (1928) is a sort of reworking of Babbitt, only this time the hero is far less sympathetic and the building up of the description of the horrors of middle-class life is much less effective. The same criticism might be levelled at the next novel, Dodsworth, which is mainly concerned with the domestic drama of an intelligent but plodding business-man who is married to a social-climbing, culture-seeking snob. One might perhaps, twenty years ago, have believed in Sam Dodsworth and his empty-headed wife Fran but today, although such people might exist, they merely present a quaint picture of middle-class absurdity amidst attempted nobility.

Ann Vickers is yet another tale of the small-town mal-content who arrives at the big city in the search for Truth, whatever that is. In this novel there are echoes of Lewis's utopian socialism, and the result of Lewis's pondering on the subject of radicalism was his satire, "It Can't Happen Here".

It Can't Happen Here (1935), a fantasy of a fascist dictatorship in America, entertains, but shows only too well that Lewis had no idea of what really went on in society, and what was really behind big business and the rise of fascism, and perhaps more important still, what was really behind the social problems that existed. This novel serves to concretise Lewis's ideas on Democracy and Radicalism. It gives a fairly convincing account of how a fascist dictatorship comes to power in America, and the subsequent repression and atrocities that go with it. Lewis did realise that people living in slump conditions, with millions of unemployed and inflated prices, were likely to find themselves, in their search for a "strong government", under a vicious dictatorship. What Lewis

fascist or communist, is established to protect the interests of a ruling class or faction.

Lewis saw this as a straight struggle between democracy and fascism, and in the novel the exiled leader of the insurgents is the defeated Republican candidate, who aims to re-establish political institutions as they were before.

The hero of the novel is an honest newspaper editor, who seeks the answer to the problem of fascism, and after searching for it among the Communists and other left-wingers, eventually decides that it is to be found in the radical scientists and the like - in short, Lewis's mixture as before. In spite of this blatant disregard of the true nature of capitalism, Lewis makes this work interesting and rewarding, and in places, even genuinely moving. However, a similar satire on a fascist dictatorship, Nathanael West's "A Cool Million", shows a far greater gift for satirising bankers and businessmen, and is also infinitely more amusing and stimulating.

After Lewis had exhausted his quasi-revolutionary sentiment in the last-mentioned work, he returned to his old standby of business craftsmanship in "Work of Art", which is a sort of hotel-keeper's vade mecum. At this stage one can regretfully conclude that Lewis's progress as a social critic was no progress at all.

Lewis's later novels show a continued decline in powers and indicate his inability to find subjects upon which he could write with conviction. It is something of a tragedy that writers of Lewis's calibre, faced with a seething mass of discontent and human problems, can find nothing better to do than to regurgitate old formulas and turn out hack work. The one exception to this in Lewis's later years is perhaps Kingsblood Royal, which convincingly tells of what happens to a white business-man living in a respectable neighbourhood, who discovers that he has negro blood, and is too honest to hide the fact. It seems likely that Lewis did not consciously turn out "pot-boilers", but honestly sought to write works of lasting value and social significance, but unfortunately, whether due to lack of social insight or downright incompetence, he never really succeeded on either of these counts.

Lewis then, was the champion of outmoded values. He sought to defend the honest scientist and the type of man who might be described as the "craftsman businessman", the man more concerned with satisfying society's needs than with making a profit, although of course, he is always gratified when a profit is made. Unfortunately, this type of man was becoming an

fewer and fewer hands, the very conditions of capitalism itself destroyed the scruples of these people, or else destroyed the men themselves. Today, the financial and industrial colossus of American capitalism bestrides half the world, and has no time for the Dodsworths and the Babbitts. It is not the reader that judges Lewis today, it is history itself.

A.W.I.

---

#### THE BETHNAL GREEN ELECTION

The party having decided to contest the Bethnal Green Constituency at the next General Election, arrangements are now being made to prepare the constituency. The candidate (Comrade W. Read) has been appointed, and some indoor meetings have been held in the area. It is hoped to arrange some debates, and notices and letters are being sent to the press. Hackney branch also hope to expand canvassing within the area.

However, all this means considerable effort on the part of the membership, and our branch will urgently need the help of other branches and members in order to make the campaign a success. A list of canvasses will be prepared for the spring, which will be advertised in the S.S., and a notice will be sent to London branches. It is hoped to arrange six or eight canvasses per month from March onwards, provided that sufficient support is forthcoming from other branches.

In due course, a circular will be sent to branches with details of proposed activities, and a meeting suggested at which branch organisers and others can arrange a suitable programme. In the meantime, of course, we would welcome all suggestions on ways to make the campaign more effective.

In the meantime, members can assist by making contributions to the Parliamentary fund, which is still very low. Donations should be sent to Head Office, payable to E. Lake.

Hackney Branch.

In the Socialist Standard of April 1957, an article by Comrade Hardy appeared entitled "The Economics of Rent Control" in which he not only made the assertion that rent control was not a working class issue but gave it the importance of a sub-heading. This induced Comrade Mayes to write to the E.C. on the matter, and in December a reply was circulated to branches, but without the letter of Comrade Mayes. As the reply seemed to be seriously misleading in certain respects, Comrade Mayes considered that something should be done to put his own point of view, which we know to coincide with that of a number of other members.

The following as an endeavour to reply to the Editorial Committee's circular and to put our own point of view at the same time. Our object is not to embarrass either the E.C. or the Editorial Committee by demanding that they admit to a mistake or to retract the article in question, but rather to get the party to thrash out these questions in order to ensure a more accurate approach in future.

We have tried to be as clear and logical as possible. If at times in expressing our thoughts we have also expressed our feelings, we can only ask your indulgence. Unfortunately we are only human, and to us politics is not a hobby but a matter of vital concern. We do not know everything; if the reader does, we can have nothing to offer; if he doesn't however, we may be able to help each other and the party. Discussion therefore will be welcome.

#### A WORD ON METHOD

Before elevating ourselves into the more ethereal regions of theoretical criticism, there are in the reply of Comrade Hardy and his associates on the Editorial Committee, three rather earthy points which we should like to dispense with first.

First, the following from page 3:- "It is also important to observe that Comrade Mayes' proposition that the party should support rent control would in fact mean opposing both the Tory rent policy and the Labour Party rent policy." Why is this so important? Had Comrade Mayes argued in favour of the Labour Party policy this would indeed have been an important point. As in fact he nowhere supported the Labour Party, the observation is not only unimportant but totally irrelevant. Why then was it made? This entirely false innuendo that Mayes is a crypto-Labourite can only be an attempt to bolster a weak case with smear tactics. We find this surprising from one whose intellectual integrity has always been regarded by most of us as unquestionable.

Secondly, concerning eviction for arrears we read the following:- "Even if we assume that having to pay rent arrears, but being able to pay them after the due date, is a material advantage...." Had Comrade Hardy ever been threatened with eviction for arrears of rent, he would not consider this to be such a shaky assumption, nor would he be so blasé about his sniping. Just how far from the real world can a socialist wander?

Lastly, a point of fact. We are told that the party "was opposed in principle to supporting reforms". Note here the unobtrusive use of the past tense. Comrade Hardy should have told us the position today, unchanged since 1910 when Conference asserted that our E.P.s would support reforms on their merits. This is hardly opposition in principle. But our case too must stand or fall on its merits and not by appeals to precedent. So to the theory. Let us see if he (or they) do any better.

First let us be clear about the argument. Although the original article was much concerned with the events of half a century ago, unless we are completely lost to this world, we presume that the article was inspired by the 1957 Rent Act. Certainly Comrade Hayes' support of rent control was concerned entirely with opposition to that part of the Act which decontrolled large numbers of houses.

Comrade Hardy turns a somersault right from the off by concerning himself with the establishment of rent control rather than its abolition. This of course enables him to largely ignore Comrade Hayes and have a much easier argument with some imaginary members of the Labour and Tory Parties (of anything up to half a century ago) concerning their motives.

It may be thought, by those unaware of the ways of a skilled debater, that dealing with this issue of rent control by discussing its application rather than its abolition is the same argument but put the other way round. This of course is exactly what we are intended to think as it facilitates the presentation of ridiculous arguments in a plausible form.

For example: Lunging out at his two imaginary opponents he says "no government in this country has ever had a policy of rent control designed simply to keep rents from rising" but that it was always "in connection with, and part of, a policy of preventing wage increases". As stated the facts are correct, the implied argument plausible (we shall deal with this later) and the point relevant. But when applied to the real issue - decontrol - is it the same argument the other way round? Is decontrol always connected with, and part of a policy of, wage increases? The proposition is obviously absurd. But if this is not what is meant then the argument means nothing at all in relation to the decontrol of rents.

Comrade Hayes has been accused in section 8 of not attempting "to deal with the reasons why both Tories and Labourites are committed to higher rents", and much play is made of the fact that they are necessary to enable landlords to keep their property in repair. From one who is so quick to point out the irrelevance of Hayes' point regarding eviction for arrears, it is surprising to hear a demand that he should wander up further side alleys; for this also has nothing to do with the decontrol of rents.

The rents of controlled houses can and have already been increased by certain fixed amounts for this purpose, and the tenant has recourse to the law if the obligatory repairs are not carried out. When a house is decontrolled however, the landlord is free to take advantage of the housing shortage (160,000 on the L.C.C. housing list alone); to line his own pockets at the expense of the tenants; and where expedient, to submit them to the "assumed" disadvantage of being thrown out on the street.

Increased rents; threats of eviction; are these not working class issues? Do these things not threaten the standards of the workers involved? Comrade Hardy apparently thinks not. Let us then examine his arguments, for now we deal with the real issue.

#### THE REAL ISSUE

It is not easy to discover these arguments, for the nearer we get to the nub of the matter the more cloudy everything becomes and, in contrast to the clarity of most of his facts and the precision of his conclusions, his line of reasoning is always implicit rather than explicit, if indeed

there is really no argument there at all, then so much the worse for Comrade Hardy.

In replying to an admittedly correct assertion by Comrade Hayes that before rent control "workers paid more out in rent from their wages", he makes the following statement: "Spending a smaller proportion of wages on rent means of course spending a larger proportion on food, clothing, travel to work and other things." We gather that there is some "significance" in this which has escaped Comrade Hayes. All this really means is that most workers spend all their wages. But surely, if they spend, say £2 on rent and £8 on other things, and later only £1 on rent and £9 on the rest, then, everything else being equal, their consumption of other goods has increased by 12½% and their consumption of housing remained the same, with a net gain to the worker. Or, conversely, if the rent is increased there is a net loss. Of course the ordinary worker does not need maths to prove this, he KNOWS he's worse off when his rent goes up.

Ah, but!, and we can hear the question. Is everything else equal? Hardy would say no, and we would agree with him. What then are the relevant variants?

In order to disprove our contention that increases in rent can lower the worker's standard of living, it must be shown that they are invariably compensated for by higher wages which would not have come about independently of the rent increases and vice versa.

#### THE IRON LAW OF WAGES

To show this would appear to be the only reason for Hardy's continual harping on the fact that rent control has always been tied to a policy of wage restraint (incidentally, when wasn't there a policy of wage restraint, rent control or no?). Many will recognise this as the old bogey of the Iron Law of Wages.

What are the facts? First on Hardy's pet theme - the introduction of rent control during the first world war by pegging rents at the 1914 levels; and in this connection we admit the point has a certain relevance.

We see from his own article (April 1957) that by January 1919 wages had risen by 100% in spite of rent controls. It may be argued that this was due to the rising cost of living and that had rents not been controlled wages would have risen still further. This would be true if wages were tied rigidly to the cost of living, but as anyone whose economics has gone beyond the infant stage knows, they are not. In this particular case the cost of living had by the same time, even with rent control, risen by 120% representing an approximate 9% decrease in real wages. Had the cost of living been further aggravated by rent increases the standard of living may have been lowered even further; but even as the figures stand, they prove that the Iron Law of Wages on which this argument is based is so much bunk (as every party member who has ever read Value, Price & Profit will know, even if the Editorial Committee seem to have forgotten it).

On the other hand, now that rents are to be increased, does it follow that wages will rise also? We do not wish to be prophetic, but we think it extremely unlikely. With the present increase in unemployment the reverse is to be expected. The employers' attitude is hardening everywhere, as also is that of the government, who some time ago took the unprecedented step of vetoing an agreed wage award of the Whitley Council to 42,000 Health Service workers. The report of the recent Cohen Committee on wages, prices and productivity is also ominous with its demands that wage increases

shall be smaller, all of which, coupled as it is with rent increases, generally foreshadows an all-out attack on our living standards which, if the much feared slump materialises, may be very successful.

But fear not, good comrades, this has nothing to do with you or the class struggle. The Brighton woman who was recently driven to suicide by her landlord's government-sponsored demands obviously had not read Comrade Hardy's "Economics of Rent Control".

But perhaps we are being too harsh here. Our remote theoreticians do recognise on page 3 that "the workers must struggle against their employers on the industrial field", and that "this is one aspect of the class struggle". So you see although their arguments rest on the Iron Law of Wages, they do know in fact that for all there are economic laws controlling the prices of commodities, including labour power, they work themselves out not by any supernatural means, but through the actual struggles of individuals and organisations in particular social circumstances.

#### THE SCHIZOPHRENIC CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

They knew this, but they argue, this immediate aspect of the class struggle must be confined to the industrial field. Politics must be kept pure and unsullied within the confines of the world of ideas - and never the twain shall meet.

How nice and cosy it would be if we could parcel up society so neatly and put the work we have no stomach for in the "industrial file". Unfortunately, whether Comrade Hardy likes it or not, even the question of wages is not a purely industrial question. Wages - real wages, that is - only have meaning as a relationship between nominal wages and price levels, i.e., cost of living; and cost of living can be influenced politically in many ways, by just such things as rent control, granting and removing of subsidies, manipulation of taxes, etc. The right to strike on which the struggle in the industrial field depends; is not this a political issue? The use of troops to break strikes: democracy itself in fact. The immediate aspect of the class struggle invades every corner of society; it cannot be confined to the industrial field; every aspect influences every other aspect and the attitudes which workers adopt to these questions have an important effect. In 1923 there was a move to abolish rent control, "but", and here I quote Comrade Hardy, "this was so unpopular that the government got cold feet and decided to make minor relaxations only". As also, "a more aggressive attitude on the part of the workers has caused wage rates to rise faster than the cost of living index".

Our case is that workers must fight for more pay, but at the same time it is important to tell them to resist the de-control of rents or any other encroachments on their living standards. In fact it is more important, as this is a political question and more strictly within our province; but both struggles are necessary, both are related, and the one means nothing without the other. To tell the worker to ignore one aspect is to tell him to fight with one hand tied behind his back.

It must be very comforting for employers to hear such propaganda from the "Party of the Working Class".

Socialism for these members is no longer the theory and practice of the class struggle involving the re-organisation of society as a means of achieving final emancipation; but the rejection of the class struggle (except for lip-service) for the mere propagation of an idea of a future existence. It is this attitude to politics which

Cash, Turner, and others was able to flourish so long. It is this attitude which is emasculating our propaganda; which caused some of us to ask conference to discuss "Idealism in the party". Conference did not think it necessary, yet within the year the party was in the throes of one of the biggest ideological controversies of its history.

All sorts of members have gone, but this undercurrent of half-sharp idealism remains, weakening our theory and negating our practice. Until it is completely eradicated, the party can never become a really virile organisation worthy of the support of the working class. That the party is failing few will deny. Unless we can administer a large dose of hard thinking, it may die.

Workers will never listen (and rightly so) to an organisation which tells them that questions involving their immediate standards of living are not their concern, however much they may agree with our general solution of the problem. Marx and Engels knew this, because it is inherent in any real understanding of the materialist conception of history.

The views of the Editorial Committee are contrary to the views of Marx and Engels, and are contrary to the expressed views of the party membership. If we accept them without the most thorough discussion and a democratic decision then we will be guilty of creating a leadership in the party. This happened in the S.D.P. - It must not happen in this organisation.

This is an appeal for independent thinking. Thought is hard work and independence needs some courage. We are sorry comrades, but it is the only way.

---

2d.